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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 177 (2015) 77 – 82

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

Global Conference on Contemporary Issues in Education, GLOBE-EDU 2014, 12-14 July 2014,
Las Vegas, USA

Increasing Quality at The Adult Training Programs Level. A Possible Approach

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Abstract

The success of a training program, in the context of a strong competitive market mainly depends on its quality. The quality as such is a controversial concept and equally multidimensional. Different authors have different concepts highlighting more or less what the specialized literature calls the quality perceived by the client. While the definitions of quality centered on the client gained weight in the business world, in the educational system it raises question marks, especially since a singular vision on the quality is not representative for the different and sometimes contradictory requirements of the different stakeholders groups. The present paper intends to introduce a possible way to approach quality on a particular adult training program (trainers' trainers) by applying a model of customer oriented curricular design with a serial development and based on using methods and techniques from different fields of activity: quality management, educational science and project management. The final purpose of this enterprise means to increase the efficiency and efficacy of this study program, respectively its success on the market.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of GLOBE-EDU 2014.

Keywords: quality, adults training program, customer, curricular design.

1. Introduction

While competitiveness became the defining trait of any organization with the aim of surviving and winning on the market, the problem of the quality of the offered products/services becomes imperious.

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In the present globalized society the education providers must permanently adapt to the requirements of a dynamic and mainly competitive market. Consequently, there is the necessity to include in their educational offer those educational programmes that are able to foresee the implicit and explicit requirements of the stakeholders and find correspondence on the labor market. A first step in this respect is listening to the both internal and external customers' "voices", in order to identify their educational needs and respectively the transmutation of these requests and expectations in terms of the product/service they offer (study programme, respectively courses). The object of the present research, the course entitled Trainers' trainers – no. 242401 ROC (Romanian Occupational Classification) code is addressed both to the trainers who partially acquired their training in the classical ways and to all those who wish to prepare for this position as it is recommended to teachers, primary school teachers, kindergarten teachers, managers of Human Resources Departments, HR specialists, internal lecturers of organizations, specialists involved in the evaluation and certification processes of the professional competencies, persons in charge of projects, representatives of public local authorities, ONG members. The aim of the programme is to develop the participants' skills necessary to realise and present interactive stimulant instructive sessions able to maintain the participants' interest very high. The best trainers are those who know that the ability to instruct others is not only owed to the expertise in a certain field but also to the ability to create a stimulant learning environment adapted to the participants.

2. A possible approach of training program design

In the following we will present a possible way to approach quality on a particular adult training program (Trainers' trainers) by applying a nine step model of customer oriented curricular design with a serial development and based on using methods and techniques from different fields of activity: quality management, educational science and project management. The final purpose of this enterprise means to increase the efficiency and efficacy of this study program, respectively its success on the market (Crişan 2012, 2013).

From economic reasons, this subchapter will summarily present the stages and the proper methods that were used (or may be used) for each of them, and the third section of the paper will highlight some aspects considered to be relevant.

2.1. The analysis of the necessity and the opportunity of planning the Trainers' training study programme

At this stage there is an initiative to collect and analyse the data relevant for starting the planning-development itself of the study programme. In this respect, a series of data regarding the stakeholders of the study programme were collected using methods as: surveys (questionnaires), interviews with teachers on the same subject; the analysis of official documents regarding the demand and supply of jobs according to the specialization offered by the study programme.

2.2. The identification of the clients and the stakeholders of the study programme

At this stage the main categories of customers and stakeholders were identified and their demands will be taken into consideration in its development using the mind-map method.

2.3. The establishment of the general aims of the study programme

The general aims of the study programme refer to the learning results manifested in knowledge and specific and transversal competencies the participants to this course should have in the end according to their qualification, respectively to the possible positions the beneficiaries of this programme will occupy.

Generally speaking, the aims are drawn from the total of the educational results and are associated to three elements: general (transversal) competencies that all the participants should have; basic specific (core) competencies for each subject, compulsory for all participants; and specific competencies for each subject on a scale ranging from the minimum to maximum associated with the particular individual interest of each student.

The general aim of any study programme is to make sure that when graduating every student has at least the minimum level of knowledge and competencies in the field they chose.

The challenge every student has to face is how to make sure they combine in the best way the curricular elements (courses, other learning experiences of the students) to achieve the intended aims.

2.4. Strategic analysis of the stage risks

This step is a decisive one for continuing or suspending the project. In this stage the risks that come with the planning-development of the study programme and the benefits it can produce are measured one against the other using the SWOT or FMEA methods.

SWOT is a strategic measurement instrument, flexible and easy to apply, used to identify the most appropriate actions regarding quality. It is used to make a strategic plan and find a solution to a problem taking into consideration the internal and external factors within an organization. The strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats that can affect the study programme are identified making it easier to find the necessary solutions.

According to ASQ (American Society for Quality) “Failure modes and effects analysis (FMEA) is a step-by-step approach for identifying all possible failures in a design, a manufacturing or assembly process, or a product or service.

“Failure modes” means the ways, or modes, in which something might fail. Failures are any errors or defects, especially ones that affect the customer, and can be potential or actual. “Effects analysis” refers to studying the consequences of those failures.

Failures are prioritized according to how serious their consequences are, how frequently they occur and how easily they can be detected. The purpose of the FMEA is to take actions to eliminate or reduce failures, starting with the highest-priority ones. Failure modes and effects analysis also documents current knowledge and actions about the risks of failures, for use in continuous improvement. FMEA is used during design to prevent failures. Later it's used for control, before and during ongoing operation of the process. Ideally, FMEA begins during the earliest conceptual stages of design and continues throughout the life of the product or service”.

2.5. The identification and prioritization of the stakeholders' requests and expectations in the study programme

At this stage the requests and expectations of the stakeholders with a major part in the planning-development and implementation of the study programme were identified. In this respect, questionnaires and interviews were applied to prospective students and the prospective employers were asked to fill in gemba forms. These describe in great detail, using the frequency, respectively utility criteria the knowledge and the competencies involved in task execution related to every position.

The identified requests and expectations will be analysed and prioritized using the AHP (Analytical Hierarchy Process) method; then, they will be translated into processes necessary to the study programme using the VOCT (voice of the customer) method (Brad, 2006).

2.6. The identification of the study subjects through correlations between competencies and content areas, respectively establishing the share between the later

The identified competencies are correlated with the content areas and the subjects leading to developing those competencies. The content areas are the main curricular fields or interdisciplinary areas in the study plan, related to the logic of the subject and the set of competencies that are to be formed. The content areas play the part of guide the consequent development of the study subject. At this stage we propose the use of the QFD (Quality Function Deployment) method. Quality Function Deployment is a method used in the field of quality planning, that, applied correctly, offers the necessary information to prevent potential conception – planning – production flaws, in order to make products according to the customers' requirements (Olaru, 2000).

2.7. The development of several possible variants of the educational plan

The educational plan of the study programme is developed through the corroboration of the knowledge needs expressed by the customers and the stakeholders with those prefigured by the occupational standard and according to the present legislations imposed by the involved organisms (NQA – The National Qualification Authority, The Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, The Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection). The study plan must contain as a minimal information: the subjects to be studied, the number of classes for lectures and seminars, applications, project, examination form and number of credits. This stage is a complex one and asks for the participation of the main actors involved in the planning – development and, later, implementation of the study programme.

2.8. Their analysis and the determination of the final configuration

After establishing the scripts considered being applicable, these will undergo a prioritization process based on criteria established mutually by the members of the design team. This process can be done using the PUGH method or the matrix diagram and will end up in a decision over the final version. In the present case, the educational plan for Trainers' training contains the following subjects: The management of the training programmes, Effective learning techniques, Communication management, Priorities, time and stress management, Interaction methods and techniques, Educational Marketing and Assessment issues - which means 50 hours of lectures and application.

2.9. The validation / accreditation of the study programme

The final version of the Trainers' training programme will be implemented and will undergo an evaluation process, at first internally and then by the competent organisms - NQA (The National Qualification Authority)- in order to be validated/accredited.

3. A possible modality to establish the subjects associated to the “Trainers’ training “study programme and their share

This part of the paper will exemplify a part of the previously introduced steps, respectively point 2.6.

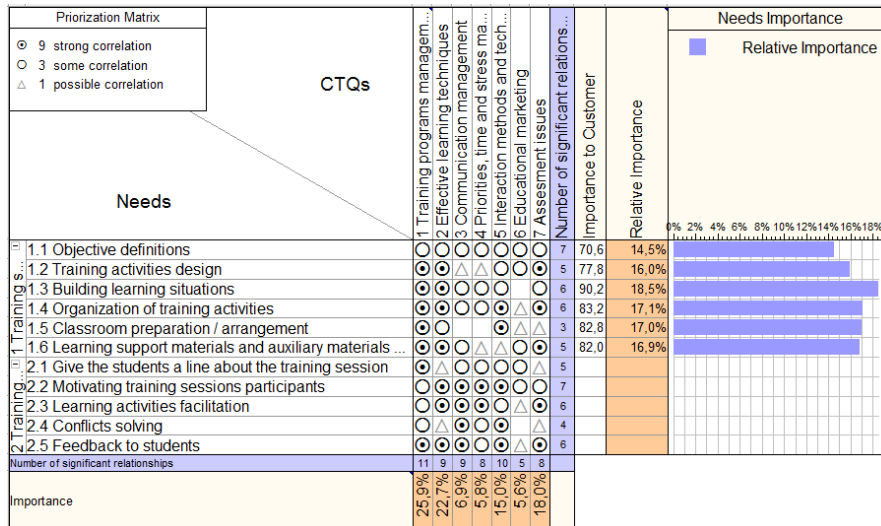


Figure 1: QFD (Quality Function Deployment) – Competences versus subjects

According to the occupational standard in use, the specific competencies for the trainer position were classified into:

- Competencies specific to the position (the staff professional training that includes the following competency units: The training preparation, The training activities, The participants' evaluation and The application of the training methods and special techniques);
- Optional competencies (The management of the training programmes that comprises the following competency units: The training marketing, The planning of the training programmes, The organization of programmes and training courses and The evaluation, revision and quality assurance of the programmes and training courses);

For every competency unit the respective sub competencies were detailed. According to those, the necessary contents were identified using brainstorming and affinities' diagram and the study subjects were established.

The sub-competencies (26 in all) were introduced in a QFD matrix in order to be correlated with the proposed subjects, to show their degree of ranging over the competencies by each discipline (Figure 1). Based on the results obtained after this analysis the share of each subject in the training programme respectively their number of hours was established (Table 1).

Table 1: The share establishing and the number of hours for each subject.

Subject	Subjects ranking	No. of hrs (ideal)	Allocated time (real)
Training programs management	25,9 %	12,95	12
Effective learning techniques	22,7 %	11,35	10
Communication management	6,9 %	3,45	6
Priorities, time and stress management	5,8 %	2,9	4
Interaction methods and techniques	15,0 %	7,5	6
Educational marketing	5,6 %	2,8	4
Assessment issues	18,0 %	9	8
Total: 50 hours			

4. Conclusions

In the present dynamic context, the education and training providers must become aware of the fact that the quality ensuring of the educational processes and products (in our case, the training and teaching-learning-evaluation processes) are a key factor of their competitiveness on the market. There is no standard recipe for steps towards quality insurance, since the organizations can choose those models, good practices, that is, that agree with specifics of the institution and can be flexibly adapted.

The quality of any training programme is determined by the quality of the curricular planning. The use in the educational design of some reasoning methods with trans-disciplinary character (QFD, FMEA, brainstorming, affinities diagram, SWOT, PEST etc) ensure a structured approach, results oriented, increasing the success rate of the training programme on the market.

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